Studies in Cyperaceae in southern Africa 43: Scirpoides varius Browning — a new name for Scirpus varius Boeck. ex. C.B. Clarke

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Received 15 September 2010; received in revised form 12 October 2010; accepted 21 October 2010

Abstract

Scirpoides varius Browning is established to accommodate the southern African endemic sedge Scirpus varius Boeck. ex C.B. Clarke, an illegitimate name in Scirpus. Morphological considerations support the transfer of the taxon to Scirpoides Ség., and there is no hindrance to the use of the epithet ‘varius’ in Scirpoides.

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Keywords: Africa; Cyperaceae; Scirpus; Scirpoides; Taxonomy

1. Introduction

Scirpus L. (1753) was until recently a large and heterogeneous genus but has been gradually reduced by segregation, its parts being assigned “to more than 50 other genera” (Goetghhebeur, 1998). Its core, Scirpus L. sensu stricto, is now understood to be essentially temperate, and predominantly American, with no species in Africa (Haines and Lye, 1983: 41). Gordon-Gray (1995) treated five species under Scirpus for KwaZulu-Natal (as Natal), South Africa but with intimation that alternative placement was necessary when some of these were more fully known. Of these species just one remains in Scirpus, namely Scirpus varius Boeck. ex C.B. Clarke (1898). The name is an illegitimate later homonym of Scirpus varius Schreb. ex Schweigg & Körte (1811), which is itself a nomen novum for Scirpus reptans Thuill.(1799). Both are homotypic synonyms of Eleocharis palustris (L.) Roem. & Schult. (Govaerts et al., 2007: 713, 765).

Scirpus varius Boeck. ex C.B. Clarke is imperfectly known, and is currently unplaced to genus (Govaerts et al., 2007). It has been recorded from the South African provinces KwaZulu-Natal and what was previously known as Transvaal (Limpopo, North West, Gauteng, Mpumalanga), and is also present in Botswana, Swaziland, and Lesotho. Plants occur in small colonies, scattered where the habitat is muddy with semi-permanent water and sometimes rock strewn soil, at altitudes of about 1400–1590 m. A new name is given in the genus Scirpoides where there is no hindrance to the use of the epithet ‘varius’.

2. Discussion

Scirpoides is morphologically intermediate between Ficina Schrader and Isolepis R.Br., leading Goetghhebeur (1998: 169) to observe that “Generic delimitation vs. Ficina and Scirpoides is highly problematic.” and under Ficina (p. 168), that “This morphologically heterogeneous genus is in need of a thorough revision.”

The absence/presence of bristles (perianth segments) developed at the base of the ovary and distributed with the mature fruit has been accorded great taxonomic significance in the group. As yet, no species bearing bristles has been admitted to either Ficina or Scirpoides, yet there are other accepted genera in which bristles range from absent, through rudimentary, to present, and usually distributed when present with the fruit. Fiurenella Rottb. and Schoenoplectus (Rchb.) Palla are South...
African examples. In *Scirpus varius*, bristles [as “hypogynous glumes”] are reported “rudimentary or 0” (Clarke, 1898: 229).

On the species cover of Buchanan 225 of *Scirpus varius*, Clarke in Dec. 1887 in pencil noted ‘It does not appear allied to any other *Scirpus* species, except *S. mexicanus* Britton’. There is another entry by Clarke in Dec 1887 — ‘The pistil has microscopic obsolete squamulae at its base, and these are obscurely seen on the dilated foot of the nut. A tendency to *Ficinia*’. Then in brackets under this — ‘Very near *Scirpus cyperoides* Hemsl.’ These comments indicated possible affinity of *Scirpus varius* with *Karinia mexicana* (Britton) Reznicek & McVaugh. Details and illustrations of *S. varius* were sent to Anton Reznicek for his observations and comparison with the endemic Mexican species. His suggestion was that the African material would best be placed in the genus *Scirpoides*.

*Scirpus varius* has a well developed basal primary bract that overtops the inflorescence and continues the line of the culm. The outermost primary bract is particularly conspicuous in its length and positioning above the flowering head, or heads. An overtopping bract is a criterion of *Scirpoides* (“primary bracts culmlike, lowermost bract erect” (Goetghebeur, 1998: 169), unlike in *Scirpus*, where the primary bracts are leaf-like and spreading (Goetghebeur, 1998: 162).

Another criterion of generic significance is embryo structure at the time of nutlet dissemination. Genera typically have the same embryo type or almost so, and thus a taxon with a differing embryo among others that are uniform, is suggestive of faulty generic placement. Unfortunately we have not been able to determine precisely the embryo type in *S. varius*. The species is rare, with very small nutlets. As the genera *Ficinia*, *Isolepis* and *Scirpoides* are all members of tribe Cypereae Dumort, we assume that *S. varius* has a Cyperus type embryo.

3. Taxonomy

3.1. Placement in Scirpoides

*Scirpoides varius* Browning nom. nov., pro *Scirpus varius* Boeckeler ex C.B. Clarke in Thiselton-Dyer, Fl. cap. 7: 229 (1898), nom. illeg., nom *S. varius* Schreb. ex Schweigg & Körte, Fl. Erlang.: 11 (1811) [= *Eleocharis palustris* (L) Roem. & Schult.].

Type: Basutoland [Lesotho], Leribe, Buchanan 225 (K!, lecto., designated here).

Note: Buchanan 225 was chosen in preference to the two other K syntypes because Clarke’s annotated pencil drawings were on this sheet.

3.2. Species description

Perennial, tufted or rhizomatous with woody rhizome, 800–1000 mm tall. Culms 3-angled apically, 1.25–2 mm diam., smooth. Leaves basal, occasionally sparse, stiff, shorter than or less often as long as culm length, 2–4 mm wide, glabrous. Inflorescence pseudolateral, overtopped by main primary bract, primary bract ± 130 mm long, erect continuing culm line; additional bracts 2, each reduced by ½ length of precursor to 3–5 small bracts invisible beyond limits of capitulum, all bracts scabrid. Flowering head solitary or in close groups of (2-) 3–4 (-5), 8–12 mm diam., sessile or shortly branched, each bracteate; collective heads 15–45 × 10–15 (-17) mm. Spikelets numerous per head, ± 4 mm long, in close packed groups; glumes spiral, occasionally appearing almost distichous, 2.25–2.75 mm long including arista of 0.6–0.85 mm long, keel and arista strongly developed, green, with 2 prominent lateral nerves, flanks delicate, brown, sometimes translucent. Stamens 3. Style branches 3, ± as long as style. Nutlet ± 0.75 × 0.4 mm, trigonous, pale brown, basal foot expanded, surface indistinctly patterned by faintly marked longitudinal striations, faintly punctulate at maturity (Fig. 1).

3.3. Notes

*Buchanan* 225 (K), and two other collections cited by Clarke (1898, p.229) are filed in the Kew Herbarium Catalogue as types of *Scirpus variabilis*, an orthographic error for *S. varius*.

3.4. Distribution

*Scirpoides varius* is endemic to sub-Saharan Africa but its distribution is as yet imperfectly delimited. Records suggest possible association with the Afromontane temperate floras as the species is present at higher altitudes and unknown south of the Tugela River basin in South Africa. Nowhere is it present in
quantity. It is in need of protection, wherever it occurs — mostly in semi-to-permanently wet areas, perhaps associated with sandy substrates (?)

4. Selected citations

- 2425 (Gaborone): Down stream of Mmakgodumo Dam, Kanye (CD), P.A. Smith 5376 (NU ex SRGH).
- 2430 (Pilgrims Rest): Hoodspruit on Olifants River, 3 km from Strydom tunnel (-BD), Arnold 370 (K, PRE); Ohrigstad Dam Nature Reserve (-DD), Jacobsen N.H.G. 2749 (PRE).
- 2531 (Komatipoort): Barberton, Transvaal; Rose’s Creek (-CC), Thorncroft PRE no. 2890 (K, PRE).
- 2628 (Heidelberg): 20.3 mls SW by W of Heidelberg (-AD), Acocks 21025 (K, PRE).
- 2631 (Mbabane): Pigs Peak, Komati Bridge near Pigg’s Peak (AA), Haines, R.W., 7045 (PRE).
- 2828 (Bethlehem): Leribe (-CC), Buchanan 225 [Kew Cat. K000671266]. Lectotype.
- 2830 (Dundee): Foot of Griffin’s Hill (-CC), Acocks 11418 (K, PRE).

Acknowledgements

Dr. David Simpson of the Herbarium, Library, Art and Archives, Royal Botanic Garden, Kew, is thanked for enabling this study to be carried out, and Rafaël Govaerts for help with nomenclature. Anton Reznicek of the Herbarium, University of Michigan, willingly gave his comments and suggestions. Clare Archer is thanked for the details of PRE material filed under *Scirpus varius*.

References


